

QUALITIES OF THE CHANGE AGENT AND THE EMPLOYEES PERFORMING CHANGE

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Abstract

This research has the purpose of studying change agent profile in relation with employees' behaviour regarding changes in organization. The paper outlines change agent qualifying characteristics for leading employees through changes, approaches personnel needs and behaviours, also recommends methods to go beyond resistance to change. The relation change agent – employees and each side successful leading skills are discussed and evidenced how influence organization capacity to change and achieve performance.

Keywords: *Change Agent, Change Management, Communication, Effective Relationship, HR Competency*

JEL classification: *M12, M51, M52*

1. Introduction

Lately, organisations act in a state of constant movement with an unpredictable pace (Thakhathi, A. 2018). The requested changes determined by this environment may involve one or more of the following components: human capital, technology, structure and objectives (Chrusciel, 2009) but no change happens without involving human resources.

The modern organization is looking to work with exceptional members, managers being the performance carriers. On the other hand, employees are to be present and involved body and soul, so organization represents more than a rational mechanism, an environment of manifested inspiration. Ability to change underlies sustainability of performance,

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therefore company needs the right people at the right place and doing the right thing with the right type of management and the culture bearer of change (Spoelstra, 2009, Long et al., 2013).

Changes are constantly happening, and change agent has a significant role in conducting successful organizational changes pursuing employees and minimising resistance to change efficiently and effectively in a volatile and very complex context (Thakhathi, A. (2018).

2. Addressing change and the importance of change agent

Change has its coordinator who takes manager, mentor and leader roles assuming responsibility for implementing the change effectively. Understanding organizational culture and policies and their value is a must for the one who coordinates changes (Spoelstra, 2009). To anticipate and accept change, understand the need for change, perceiving its results, planning it, implementing and evaluating are actions taken by the change agent. Knowing change context and adapting appropriate strategy, empowering others timely manner and using appropriate methods are factors that will determine the productive change (Hallinger, 2011).

Successfully change implementation has initial condition employees' perception (Jansen, Shipp & Michael, 2015). Change agent has the responsibility to align employees' expectations on change using adequate communication (Long et al., 2013). Also, the change agent presents the change, so personnel understand that managers are involved and embrace the change, introducing personal and organization's benefits the organization expects to reach. Moreover, change agent has the responsibility to provide clear guidance, to communicate what will change and what will remain unchanged, and one of his roles is to improve employees' change capacity (Walker, Armenakis & Bernerth, 2007). While changing implementation feedback plays an important role being given effectively and well-received. "People need to stop treating feedback only as something that must be pushed and instead improve their ability to pull" (Goleman, Sonnenfeld & Achor, 2017, p.22).

Every change coordinator, to be efficient, needs to master the following areas: stakeholder management, change coordinating, change strategy, communication, human capital management, learning and training processes and infrastructures, project management and performance management. As each person has a unique character, likewise every organization has its peculiarities, so to master different areas and choose the

most appropriate methods and timing are skills required of an efficient manager (Darby, 2010). Opportunities and threats have become important priorities for managers that will continue to demand more attention in the constantly changing economy. Change agent plays a crucial role in change management, having the function to clarify and keep the vision of the organization, to engage and support human resource throughout change processes (Drucker, 2007).

Change agent fulfills five roles: to accomplish change, to change values, to distribute power, to maintain the change proper environment and organizational empowerment. Change leader has the responsibility to analyze and understand organization needs, to use incentives, to temper and guide behaviors and effectively manage change (Lawrence, 2009).

3. Change agent and employees' successful qualities

To be a leader without being a manager is a perishing situation, as well as vice versa, alike change with no stability is chaos, therefore the change agent is a manager and a leader. One of the most important characteristics of the agent is given the intrinsic value of the change initiative. It can be seen as a challenge, willingness to learn, desire of performance or own pride (Chrusciel, 2009). Weber and Weber (2001) present the change agent as the extraordinary person, with unusual qualities, visionary, charismatic, indicating the connection between spirituality and organization. It is emphasized that a more charismatic leadership style facilitates involvement of human resource and supports innovation. Change agent inspiring a sense of identity affects positively employees' collaboration. Charismatic leader aims to influence the environment for cooperation, open communication, with beneficial effects on innovativeness, employees feeling free to express their innovative ideas (Weber & Weber, 2001).

Lately studies have attempted to highlight the link between rhetoric and management, rhetoric referring to conviction and management to persuading individuals to act in a certain way, supporting the convincing path to lead people and not coercion. In addition to rhetoric as a tool to persuade people, the one leading requires strong virtues and understanding the values sustaining conviction (Jensen, 2010). It outlines a new feature, that of the rhetorician manager. Often senior managers reject the idea that oratory would have to deal with efficient communication. Change agent is the one giving change a meaning, is a storyteller, an orator, a creator of new directions, conversation partner, but not before formulating the communication strategy

to help people understand the need for change, as to present the action plan and show direction. As a strategic leader, change agent anticipates, challenges, interprets, decides, aligns and learns (Goleman, et al., 2020, Nilsson, 2010).

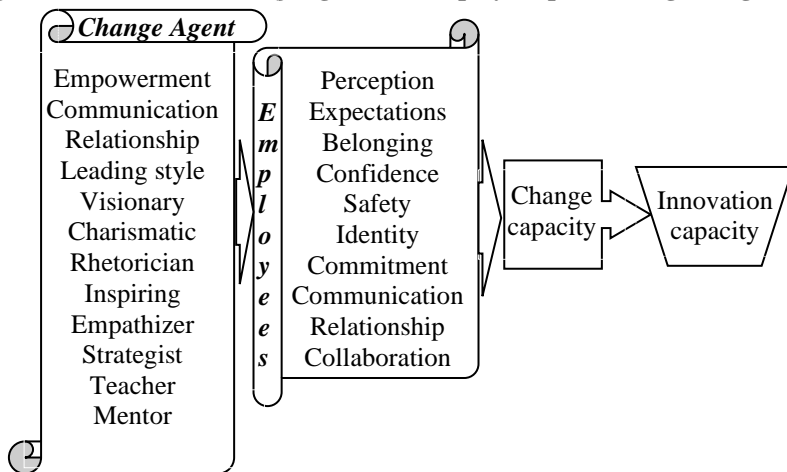
Furthermore, change carrier strengthen self-esteem of employees using appropriate tone, or demolishing a sense to build a new one, contributing to the identity of the organization and its members, supporting innovation and performance (Reissner, 2010), thus develops, coordinates organizational culture, the way of thinking and behavior. Change agent earns followers through challenging and supportive language to enrich organization's vision, using the rhetorical excellence. Through conversational communication and charisma change agent pursues, always attracting attention and inspire employees to achieve organizational goals (Karsten et al., 2009).

Emotionally and cognitively open, change agent copes strategically maintaining and developing communication and relationships through intimacy, intentionality, interactivity and inclusion. Moreover, is a good teacher to be an excellent leader in challenging dynamic times (Goleman et al., 2020). Successful leaders are those who know to harmonize the needs of people with the requests of their activities, showing a positive attitude encouraging others. Ready for change managers know what effective communication means, to distinguish between assertiveness, to handle aggression, to build trust and loyalty, and to understand human behavior. An effective change agent combines networking ability and good sense with credibility and flexibility, taking risk, having charisma, being good motivator, inspiring intrinsic motivation, understanding the need to learn and the importance of learning from organization and its members (Armenakis et al., 2007 , Chrusciel, 2009, Thakhathi, A. 2018).

More than says, change agent conduct by example (Lawrence, 2009). Showing dedication and sharing vision, change agent inspires to new goals. The quality of manager – employee relationships influence employees' commitment and thus implementing change. A study on managers performance emphasized the importance of nurturing and ability to connect with others, considered the ability to identify with others and relating to them, a way to increase the influence. The performers know to care for others, look upon subordinates with optimism, seeking their advice and actively listen to anyone. Networking happens at three levels each: with a single person, a group, or an audience, but the connection is vital in all cases (Maxwell, 2010).

J.C. Maxwell (2010) suggests talking more about the other person and less about oneself, informing on any help that could be offered and implementing it, to complement, to add value, and to celebrate successes. Rather than rational decisions, promoter of change will empathize with others and seek to understand (Jensen, 2010).

Figure 1: Qualities of change agent and employees performing change



In Figure 1 are summarized change agent characteristics influencing employees' response to change and their skills that determine organization change capacity which results in impacting organization innovativeness. Change participants' perception could take four forms: champion, doubter, convert or defector. The change champions are the early adopters and completion supporters, while doubters avoid taking action, defectors may have their expectation unfulfilled, and converts could shift from unsupportive to change supportive perception along the change process. These perception patterns stand under each individual momentum perception. Thus, change commitment and accomplished expectations require constant efforts (Jansen, Shipp & Michael, 2015).

To develop a change favorable environment, to turn attention toward the desired direction is demanded to choose appropriate leading style. In terms of emotional intelligence, Daniel Goleman identifies six leadership styles:

- coercive - autocratic attitude used in emergency situations;
- visionary - mobilizing for new vision, effective change;

- affiliate - creating harmony, effective motivation;
- democratic - involving employees, useful in the search for solutions and employees' involvement;
- coordinator - presenting standards, indicated in quick action having prepared personnel;
- guide – effective in development and improvement of human capital (Cândea & Cândea, 2005).

Not only change agent conducting through suitable leading style but the atmosphere created, at all levels of the organization, have a major role in successful changes (Lawrence, 2009).

4. Approaching resistance to change

As sometimes changes are met with suspicion, change agent has to evidence how personnel resistance to change results in failure. Thus, change agent inspires and motivates learning and otherwise change culture. Analysing individual personality opponents to change, identifying and caring for their beliefs, values and goals, for their change perceptions are necessary to understand the nature of resistance and find bridges to change (Jansen, K. J., Shipp, A. J. & Michael, J. H., 2015, Long et al., 2013, Straker, 2008).

Before installing, resistance to change has its signals, such as slander or avoidance, in this situation it is necessary to provide information, care and support from the change coordinator, to minimise resistance to change in order to lead with assertiveness for change to be tested. Manifestation of resistance in an organization can be individually or as a group, the forms that it takes are hidden or overt, passive or active (Armenakis et al., 2007).

Methods suggested to solve resistance to change are: facilitation, education, engagement, negotiation, handling (shown only in the short term and only when none of the above does not work), and coercion (recommended only in extreme situations when time is opponent) (Cutcher, 2009). The response face to face, in unexpected opposition state, claims first a break (to count to three), then listening carefully words, fears, ambitions, hopes (using questions), empathizing with affirmed position and providing response using interlocutor manner of expression (Armenakis et al., 2007).

One of the most applied strategy to overcome resistance to change aims following steps:

- training and communication;
- participation and involvement;

- facilitation and support;
- negotiation and understanding;
- handling and cooperation;
- implicit and explicit punishment.

This model was developed by John Kotter to address resistance to change and is recommended to trace steps sequence (Kotter & Schlesinger, 2008).

Employees' engagement during change process requires often feedback to improve performance and align expectations. The giver and the receiver are both responsible of the feedback result. It calls for a trained and skilful communicator, but also for educated receivers who need to understand what is said and who have control over decision of accepting it or not. Frequently feedback activates an emotional reaction that needs to be identified and managed by the receiver. There are three major emotional triggers: truth, relationship and identity, triggers shaped by the tension between the self-development and acceptance needs. To recognise and learn to manage emotions triggered by feedback leads to gaining value from it. Those dealing step by step with these tiggers win the challenge of receiving feedback (Goleman, Sonnenfeld & Achor, 2017).

Change agent knows how to choose the most appropriate approach to change promoting behaviours and change perceptions, thereby changing organizational culture.

5. Conclusions

Change agent has a very important role in the organization, assuming responsibility for implementing the change effectively. How change agent relates to employees is definitive in achieving change. Therefore, understanding the requirements of this role is essential. Human resource is the most valuable capital of the organization and requires an appropriate approach.

Analyzing qualities that define a successful change agent led to the following elements any change agent must master them accurately: empowerment, communication, relationship, leading style, visionary, charismatic rhetorician, inspiring, empathizer, strategist, teacher, and mentor. These characteristics are closely related to employees' approach to change.

Employees' behavior is influenced by change agent behavior. Change agent skills influence the qualities of employees required to achieve successful changes in organization. These elements in direct relation with employees

addressing changes are: perception, expectations, belonging, confidence, safety, identity, commitment, communication, relationship and collaboration. Thereby, change agent – employees relationship has deep consequences on organizational change capacity and innovation capacity.

As sometimes changes are met with suspicion, to minimize resistance to change is mandatory, to understand how it appears and manifests, what methods are effective, how to offer and receive feedback, how to develop a change favorable environment, to turn attention toward the desired direction is demanded from those conducting through change processes and the change makers.

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